

James T. Jeremiah
Baptist Distinctives, Part 1
December 1, 1981

Transcript

James T. Jeremiah:

Thought that last little bit was for me. But I just told the president I didn't plan to sing, and everybody said, "Amen." I really appreciated Dr. Anderson. I appreciated him not only singing this morning, but in his ministry, in the school, and believe it or not, I appreciated him when he was a student. And that's a few days ago. You've heard of the preacher, I suppose who said, "Before I preach, I want to say something."

James T. Jeremiah:

Before I speak this morning, I want to make an announcement. First of all, I want to make an announcement for Dr. Robert Gromacki, who will be leading a group of students this summer to study at the American School of Holy Land Studies. And if you have the money and the time, and I trust the burden, you will see him and line up to be one of those students in that place for several weeks. In the event, you can do that and you'd like to go for two weeks, 12 days to the holy land, we'll be leaving on the 15th of March and you students will be able to earn credit for this tour also.

James T. Jeremiah:

In our absence, Dr. Martin Clark will be in charge of this and you need to see him. There will be some posters put up eventually announcing this, but if you're interested, please see Dr. Clark. Let's pray together. Father in heaven. We're glad for this opportunity of chapel. We pray as we discuss some matters that pertain to our own particular Bible-believing group of people that the spirit of God will use this in our lives today. In Jesus name. Amen. I have been informed that on this campus, 82% of the students come from Baptist churches. That is quite a list. I understand 54 of them or 54% are from the Regular Baptist churches. The remainder of you probably are Baptist and don't know it. And I would suggest you keep reading the Bible and it'll lead you to the truth.

James T. Jeremiah:

From the day this school started as a Baptist college, every student who applied to this place qualified was a saved individual and met the entrance requirements, was given entrance into this place, whether they were Baptist or not. And that's the way it ought to be, that's the way it will be. I'm sure. Sometimes when we talk about Baptist distinctives, immediately, we put up a guard and we become a little bit critical because somebody said, "Well, I'm not a denominationalist." Oh yes, you are. Let me prove it. If you had somebody owing you some money, say they owed your \$10, and you got a letter in the mail and they gave you a \$5. You immediately become denominational.

James T. Jeremiah:

Most of you will defend the Ford and some of you will defend the Chevrolet. And once in a while, somebody defends a Buick. And let me tell you, if you stand in the way of that, you become anti denominational too. You like the name you've been given, some of you girls don't, you try to change it, but until you succeed, you're going to be denominational. But you see Baptists have other distinguishing marks other than immersion. A buddy said, "if he's an immersionist, he must be a Baptist." He could be several other things. The church of God immerses, the church of Christ immerses, the seven day Adventists immerse. And I learned one day as a young Christian, just a student in the seminary, as I

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attended a funeral to one of our relatives, a man came that I had never met, but he was a relative of a relative.

James T. Jeremiah:

And he came to me with the idea in mind that he was going to help me be a better preacher when I got into the ministry. And so he told me that I ought to take seriously, very seriously, the command in 1 Corinthians 15:29, which reads, "Else, what shall they do who are baptized for the dead, if the dead rise not at all." And he proceeded to give me Mormon doctrine. Mormons believe in immersion. They are so great on it, they believe in baptizing for those who have already died, but they're not Baptist.

James T. Jeremiah:

Baptists have some distinguishing marks. And we want to think we do this week about them. Baptists are several things, but there are several things they are not. Baptists are not reformation Protestants. Now that may be a shocker and maybe a disappointment and may arise a considerable amount of disagreement. But I've been told that the people who preach in this chapel or on the staff are open to criticism. Those who come in from outside are not. You're open to criticize, I'm leaving on Friday. According to Vetter, who was a Baptist historian, the word Baptist as the descriptive name of a body of Christians was first used in English literature, so far as is known in the year 1644, which is a little bit beyond, at least the beginning of the reformation. There are some, and I think with some justification, believe there were people who held the doctrines, at least some of the doctrines, perhaps many of the doctrines we hold, who held them before there was a reformation.

James T. Jeremiah:

Baptist are not reformation Protestants. Baptists are not religious Sacramentarians. That is, no one becomes an inheritor of the kingdom of God. When somebody with an open hand puts a little water on an open head and makes them inheritors of the kingdom of God, no way. Nobody becomes an inheritor of the kingdom of God by taking communion. We're not Sacramentarians, we do not believe that there's any saving value in the ordinances, be they two or seven. Baptists are not apostolic successionists. No one will waste time trying to trace the Baptist cause back to the apostles. I have no desire to be able to trace my lineage to John the Baptist, any more than I do to Simon Peter. But Baptists are successionists in this, that they believe in apostolic doctrine. And they believe in the succession of that.

James T. Jeremiah:

Now there are some people with the name, Baptist who aren't, and there are some people without the name who are. I may sound strange, but when you think about it this morning and tomorrow morning and the next morning, maybe you will fit into the pattern and you may not even have the name. Nothing wrong with it, it's a good name. I wouldn't like it very well, for example, concerning names. There's some people advocating this kind of thing, but if after being married for 45 years, my wife would say, "I don't like the word Jeremiah." She better like it. It's a good name. Now of course, there are some of the other crowd who were trying to get us to believe that the ladies ought to keep their old name, but when we read in the scriptures that when Adam and Eve were married, at least their name was called Adam. That's good enough for me. When is a Baptist, a Baptist? What are their distinctives? Sometimes Baptists remind me of a flower garden. I met some of them that are morning glories, you never see them Sunday night.

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James T. Jeremiah:

They then immediately somewhere between 12 noon on Sunday morning and six o'clock Sunday night, they become members of the invisible church. Oh I met a few who probably could fit into the category of a Christmas cactus. They come when the candy boxes are ready to hand out to the kids. Nobody knows how they feel the church may be supported in between Christmases and candy boxes. I met a few who are Easter lilies. They only come on Easter Sunday. And then oh, I've found a few Mother's day chrysanthemums. They come to honor mother on the Lord's day, that particular time of the year.

James T. Jeremiah:

Well, there are some, I guess who probably would be roses. They start out well, they smell nice, but they don't last long. Every once in a while, I find even among the Baptists who are daisies. He loves me, he loves me not. I was preaching one day in California, down in the desert [illegible word] California. And it was during the days when a lot of debate was going on in certain areas, which is probably any time you want to name it. And I mentioned to these Baptists, I am a Five Point Baptist and now the crowds said, somebody said, "Tell me, what is it?" Well, I said, "I believe in TULIP." Now, I suppose to 90% of you people, I have to explain TULIP. Do I? TULIP is the mark of those who believe in the great doctrines of Calvinism.

James T. Jeremiah:

But I've changed TULIP a little bit, if you don't mind. I believe in many of those great doctrines. Most of them, I presume. I believe the word of God teaches the great doctrines of grace, and we'll leave that where it is and emphasize what we want to emphasize today. Let's write down the word TULIP and you'll have the Baptist distinctives. Now, there's some things about tulips I don't particularly like, and I guess they don't last long either, but I hope this group of tulips will last a little longer. Let's take the letters TULIP, T for the truth of scripture, U, not for unconditional election though that's a good doctrine, but unlimited, unceasing, unconditional evangelism. That's one of the marks of Bible-believing Baptists. L, the Lordship of Christ over the local church, I, the immersion of believers and then P, the priesthood of the individual Christian, five good points. I will put in some others as we go along, but that will maybe help to keep it straight a little bit.

James T. Jeremiah:

Today we want to discuss with you for the moments we have something about the truth, the authority, the infallibility, and the inerrancy of scripture. In the second chapter of The Book of Acts, these early Christians in verse 41 of chapter 2, "Then they that gladly received his word were baptized. The same day they were added onto them, about 3000 souls." And down a bit farther in the scripture it says, "They continued steadfastly in the Apostle's doctrine." Now let me make it very clear this morning, as clear as I know how to make it, and as emphatic as I know how to say it, that if we do not start with this point of the authority, the inerrancy, the inspiration of the scriptures, we might as well depart and leave the rest of it because there's no basis for anything that follows. Baptists have believed through the centuries, in the word of God, the authority of it, they have never accepted creed as their final authority.

James T. Jeremiah:

Their argument is what does the word of God say? What does the Bible say? We hear people sometimes trying to trace Baptist doctrine by church councils. Most of us could care less what the councils say, other than in the thing that it does to help us understand the history of the church. We're concerned

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what The Book says. And every last one of us in this place better be concerned about it. And we better be willing to defend it. Not only in saying something but living something, and being what we ought to be in a day like this. When I was a young Christian, somewhere along the line, I came across some statements about the word of God that I've never forgotten. And I'd like to use them this morning as a sort of an outline of this. "Whatever the Bible teaches, says the Baptist, is to be believed."

James T. Jeremiah:

"Whatever it commands is to be obeyed, whatever it condemns is to be avoided and whatever it neither commands or teaches is to be imposed on other believers." The early Christians, we think particularly this morning of the Thessalonian church, those people in that day, it was written to them, "When you received the word of God, you received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh in you that believe." These people, like those of you who today believe it like, Baptists through the centuries have believed it, believed the word of God without question. They believed it without hesitancy, they believed it without argument, they believed it without explanation. We do not take seriously the concept that we need to explain the miraculous. We believe the miraculous. We do not try to explain the miracles, for the explanations of the miracles sometimes become more difficult than the miracles without the explanation. We take the miracles, the miraculous, the supernatural, the word of God states as being fact and history, and we can depend on it. This is a Baptist distinctive.

James T. Jeremiah:

Many years ago, one of the great Baptists of all time, Charles Haddon Spurgeon, wrote this about the word of God. He said, "I bless God that he gave us not a classical gospel or a mathematical gospel or a metaphysical gospel or a gospel confined to scholars or men of genius, but a poor man's gospel, a ploughman's gospel. For that is the kind of gospel we can live and die upon. It is to us, not the luxury of refinement, but the staple bread of life. We want no fine words when the heart is heavy, nor deep problems when facing eternity. Jesus manifest in the flesh is our bread of life. Jesus bleeding on the cross, a substitute for sinners is our soul's drink. This is the gospel for babes and strong men who want no more. What the Bible teaches is to be believed, what it condemns or what it commands us to be obeyed."

James T. Jeremiah:

The early Christians, as you recall, were set before the council and accused. As you read in The Book of Acts in chapter five, when they were accused, they answered this way, "We ought to obey God, rather than men." Paul in writing to the Ephesian Christians in chapter six and verse six said, "As servants of Christ doing the will of God from the heart." Now, one of the tragedies that exists in Baptist churches and Baptist schools is that all of us know more of the Bible and believe more of the Bible than we're willing to put into practice. And we're going to be a farce, and we're going to be an object of ridicule, and we're going to be instruments of hypocrisy, if we profess to believe it and fail to obey it. Another great Christian in this country, William Jennings Bryan asked the answer to the question, is the Bible true?

James T. Jeremiah:

And he said, "The Bible is either true or false. It is the word of God or the work of man, one or the other. If the Bible is the work of man then it is not the word of God. And if the Bible is just the work of man, it is

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the greatest imposter this world has ever seen. From its first page to its last the Bible claims to be the revealed will of God. If it can be convinced or can be convicted of being a lie, it not only must come down from its high place to the level of man-made books, but it will sink lower than that. If it can be convicted of being an imposter, it never can survive the odium which that conviction will place upon it. But if it is true, then there is no other book to be mentioned in comparison with it, even it is true, then no guesses of any man can be substituted for the word of God. And let me add, we have no excuse, whatever, for not obeying it."

James T. Jeremiah:

Baptists believe the Bible, something that teaches the truth, it should be believed, commands a way of life. It should be followed, and what it condemns is to be avoided. For example, Bible condemns, carnal living. 1 Thessalonians 5:22, Paul said, "Abstain from all appearance of evil." That covers a great deal of activity of life. Condemns ungodly companions. Ephesians 5:11 to 12 says, "Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them." It condemns apostate or false teachers and causes every Bible believer to face squarely the responsibility of separation from that kind of teaching. John in that second letter said, concerning anyone who would come and bring not a doctrine of Christ, that "He should not be received, neither should anyone bid him God speed." Jesus In Matthew 7:15 said, "Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly, they are ravaging wolves." What the Bible condemns is to be avoided.

James T. Jeremiah:

I must not only know the blessed promises of eternal life and of heaven as we think often in this chapel with people praying for those that we've loved a long time and see them coming to the end of this journey and knowing that they're going to heaven. More and more, they pass on to that place. And we become more and more excited about that. My friend, while we're here, while we're waiting for that place and blessedly receiving the promises of God, we better take seriously the commands of scripture and avoid that which it condemns. We have no business following the unfruitful works of darkness. The fourth place that the Bible neither commands or teaches is to be imposed on the believer. This is a point that could well be emphasized in our time, because there are many so-called people, fundamentalist, conservatives, or whatever you call them who are, and I don't like to speak disparaging of the word fundamentalist because I am one.

James T. Jeremiah:

And I don't hesitate to tell you that. When I tell you, when we find people who will take personal preferences, and personal ideas, and self conceived doctrines, and take a concordance and hunt up verses to prove it, then we better be careful. Word of God gives liberty to the child of God. 1 Corinthians 6:12, and 10:23 make that very clear. There are three things Paul said that spell out that Liberty. "We are free to do that which is expedient or profitable or beneficial." Anything that's beneficial or profitable to the child of God is free to be done. "That which does not master or enslave me, I'm free to do." Paul said, "I will not be mastered by anything." That eliminates a lot of the things of this world. A lot of people, I've heard them say "I can drink or I can't," but when they get so much, they can't. "I can smoke or I can't."

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But when they go so far, they have a little piece of paper running them all over the place and they can't get rid of it. That enslaves them. You see the word of God talks about freedom from being enslaved. It also tells us that, "That which edifies, or is constructed, we may do." Let's make it clear that we ought to have our personal preferences, our personal convictions, but when they are not biblically oriented, let's not try to press them upon somebody else, and say, "Unless you follow my way you're backslidden" or that you need some kind of special happening in your life. Now, maybe we do, that may be well, but it's not our business to pass judgment in that fashion.

James T. Jeremiah:

"Whatever it, neither commands or teaches us to be imposed on the believer." Now, again, let me close by saying that simply says that there are certain things that Baptists are not in the light of the authority of scripture. And I might as well say it because I believe it with all my heart. Baptists are not the modern day kind of charismatics. Now, we're living in a day when a whole lot of people are interpreting the scripture on what they see, and how they feel, and what they dream, rather than on what God says. I saw one of these character. I mean, charismatics one day on TV.

James T. Jeremiah:

I turned it on. There was a religious program. I thought I'd listen. He said, "You know, something happened last night, so remarkable. I heard the dogs barking". That's not so remarkable. "And I got up to see what made them bark. And I walked downstairs and there stood a man, 10 feet tall. And I said to him, as I looked up to him, who are you?" "I am Gabriel from heaven." And as I talked to him, he said, "Gradually, our eyes met to demonstrate that all are equal in heaven." Can I say baloney and be forgiven? I listened to one just this morning, before the news, they were walking down the street and a great, big ball, yellow in its color appeared. And I got direction and recovery from heaven. Well, they may have been going toward the sunset, or they might've been up early enough to go to the sunrise. But young people don't, you interpret the scriptures on what you feel or see, or hear. You read them.

James T. Jeremiah:

And you abide by what they say. Some of these people would take a warm drink of milk before they go to bed, they wouldn't have these dreams. Baptists are not charismatics, Baptists are not liberals. A Liberal is the person who is restricted by the teaching. I'm sorry, who is not restricted by the teaching of scripture. Liberal says, "My mind interprets it", one group says, "Our feelings do", the other group says, "It's my mind that tells me what's the truth of God." It isn't all true, it's some true, I have the ability to figure out what is true. Listen friend, we have this argument today that you can trust the Bible soteriologically for salvation, but you cannot trust it historically, don't ever forget it. Soteriology is historical.

James T. Jeremiah:

It's based upon a historical Christ who died a historical death and was raised historically from the tomb. And if you doubt it one place, you have no way of finding out what's right in the next. We're not libertines either. Libertine is the man who's unrestrained in his way of living. We live according to the word of God. Baptists had taught that through the centuries. We're not legalists, we do not accept excessive conformity to man-made religious codes that are not based upon the word of God. Young lady received a letter, it was from her beloved. She made a confession. She said, "I read the letter five times. Not because I didn't understand it the first time, nor because I expect to commend myself to the author

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by frequent reading of his epistle. I read it because, guess what? I am devoted to the one who wrote it." I like that.

James T. Jeremiah:

You have a love letter, word of God. We read it because of what it does to help us, yes, but because we love him who gave it. Edgar Guest has written many lines. Some I'm sure quotable, others may not be, but here's one that is. "And should my soul be torn with grief, upon my shelf I find a little volume, torn and thumbed. For comfort just designed, I take my little Bible down and read it's pages o'er, and when I part from it, I find I'm stronger than before." Baptists believe in the inerrancy, in the authority, in the supernatural element of the word of God. And it works in the lives of men and women who trust it and obey it. Our father, use thy word in our hearts today, help us to realize the importance in our living of the truth of scripture in our lives. In Jesus name, Amen.

Paul Dixon:

Thank you, Dr. Jeremiah. An excellent message for us. We know we look forward to this series and God's going to use it in our lives. Have a good day.